



COMPENDIUM SUMMARY

SUMMARY

The context

It seems that there is a universal (and almost timeless) playing field of conflict and polarisation on which all of mankind interacts in specific ways. Everything in this game is fuelled and propelled by stories and narratives: personal lives, identities, interactions, economy, religion, cultures, and so on. Narratives and stories play an important part in society. They can *make* an individual, a community, a value system but - as it seems - they can also *bring it down*, as the effects of polarisation prove occasionally.

Currently there is almost no issue that does not show opposing parties: citizen vs. government, native vs. immigrant or refugee, environmental activists vs. big business, democrats vs. autocrats, have-nots vs. haves, etc. It is 'us against them' (a phenomenon ~~the~~that we are familiar with for millennia), an abyss of discord, incomprehension, and irreconcilability.

Additionally, the global rise of populism, nationalism and isolationism - all fuelling conflicts and polarisation - seem to lead to an ever growing (social) disruption and alienation, a growing sense of inequity and injustice, which not only affects individuals and groups, but also nations. Dominating (social) discourses create a huge gap between the common and shared 'values' people claimed to embrace.

The (social) media and their 'trending topics' have become the *virtual* trenches for 'truth' versus 'truth'. And more: emerging from the internet, supporters of the extreme-right conspiracy theory 'QAnon' are increasingly (and aggressively) making themselves heard in the real world. Conspiracy theories - from the extreme-right as well as the extreme left - come up more often in reaction to events that are so far-reaching that people do not believe or cannot grasp the official lecture. The Covid-19 pandemic that broke out early 2020 falls into that category and serves as an umbrella under which various theories and alternative truths come together and incite radicalisation.

Next to the digital media, indignation also finds its ally on television, in conflict-seeking talk shows that become a stage for those at the extreme ends, with 'clarifying' moderators who consciously or unconsciously feed polarisation.

Laws against hate, hate speech and discrimination were (and still are) difficult to enforce and depending on the good will of national justice. European policy recommendations are 'just' that and not yet hard obligations.

However, and this may be the 'silver lining', history and present times show that mankind is more resilient to the dark side, conflicts, polarisation *and* crises than many want us to believe.

In the wake of disasters, most people show their altruistic self and urgently engage in caring for themselves and those around them, strangers and neighbours as well as friends and loved ones. Decades of meticulous sociological research on behaviour in disasters have demonstrated this.

In times of crisis, conflict and polarisation, it may pay to build on these and similar stories for finding the common ground for a common future and a sustainable and safe co-existence.

It might be that the current pandemic crisis is the chance to change systems and system narratives, re-constructing them one story at a time.

Belief in that may lag behind, and this was the motivation behind the 'Common Ground, Common Future' (CGCF) project. If we understand the causes and drivers of conflict and polarisation, we might be able to initiate and support the desired change.

Chapter 1 - Storytelling

Stories and narratives originate from different needs and experiences, but foremost from our need for meaning and sense. Meaning-making is how we construct, understand and make sense of events, (human) relationships and the self.

One idea of storytelling is that it started with how we experience the data-rich and often threatening environment around us: nature and its phenomena. Man evolved a *mimetic* mind, meaning a set of capacities that enabled him to represent and communicate ('mimesis'), using expressions like pointing, gesture, posture, movement, vocal sound. And then there was the moment when we started to give names to things, natural phenomena and emotions. Language made possible that we started to look at the world in order to tell about it. From the onset of language, stories shaped how we understand the world. Stories - especially in oral storytelling - let us experience and express emotions, engage us, and can invoke understanding for and empathy with others.

The capacity to *invent* stories (fiction), especially stories that highlight agents as causes of events, led to myth and religion, and other forms of bonding and within-group cooperation.

Oral history and *oral storytelling* are (still) an integral part of human society. Oral storytelling can be divided into three categories: Spontaneous conversational storytelling, elicited storytelling, and formal storytelling – in the last setting the stories are told by a trained and/or professional storyteller. In all categories, oral storytelling is the narration and the transmission of a real or imaginary story in front of a listener, in the same place, at the same time.

We refer to *Applied Oral Storytelling* when the storyteller has a specific intention with the stories. An example would be working with groups in conflict areas: to be invited to share experiences (even in a simple way) and to be heard, becoming aware of what a story is (meaning and sense), and understanding the impact of that for the self and others can lead to a big leap in self-confidence and in mutual communication.

The *neurological impact* of storytelling underpins and proves the above. When we listen to a story, it is not only the language areas in our brains that are activated, but also the motoric, sensual and visual areas. Much recent work shows that the same brain network is activated in memory, imagination and fore-planning, perspective-taking, and social scenarios, and suggests that we flexibly combine elements of episodic memory in order to plan for the future, particularly in social context.

Chapter 2 – Story Qualities and Story Structures

Here we take a look at the *constructive* (functional) qualities and effects of stories, which are (to name a few): inspiration, imagination, memory retention, knowledge- and information transfer, connecting people, consolation, healing, entertainment, engagement, (creation of) mutual respect, taking perception (empathy), (creation of) values (value systems), action (initiative), planning, strategy, anticipation (of events, actions).

However, we have also to be aware of the *destructive* effects of stories, such as eliciting fear, hate, anger, or discrimination.

In addition, many of the functions of stories can also be interpreted as *intentions*. One should be aware of that when working with people and their stories.

There is almost always an intention when we tell a story, it can be well-intended and, on the other hand, it can be malicious. Also, sometimes the teller's intentions can be misinterpreted because – and often with the best intention – he or she gave a story that led the listeners' interpretation (and meaning making) in the wrong direction.

One of the most striking features of a story is its **structure**. Stories seem to answer our need for organizing data and information into meaningful structures. We are probably already evolutionary ‘wired’ for recognizing a story: a story structure is a cultural code we are born into.

We present multiple views of the structure of stories, and they have resemblances. The most common and universal structure is the traditional story called **folk tale**. It includes *context* (setting and characters, current state), *turning point* (crisis or problem, initiating the story), *action* (how the people in the story respond to the problem, including complications, further difficulties, challenges), *reversal / transformation* (something happens that induces change and/or transformation), and *resolution* (the outcome of the story, sometimes ‘the moral’ or ‘the learning’).

The most striking feature of stories is that they always include *change* (i.e. crisis, but also *transformation*). Something (terrible) ‘suddenly’ happens and has to change and become transformed into a preferred situation.

Similar to the folk tale and with a circular structure is **The Hero’s Journey**. Many epics have been analysed and compared through it. It stresses the journey of the protagonist into and through prior unknown territory, which can (in the material sense) be literally ‘unknown territory’ or enemies but (in a spiritual sense) also the self. The Hero’s Journey can be episodic: the protagonist prevails and returns with a learning that he can also share with others, but he can - at a certain moment - face a novel challenge, which forces him/her to embark on the following (learning) journey.

The **actantial model** offers a structure to analyse the action that takes place in a story, whether real or fictional. It includes six actants: subject (hero/protagonist), subject/object (of the quest), sender (benefactor who initiates the quest), receiver (beneficiary), helper (person or tool), and opponent (villain). Without the contribution of each actant the story may be incomplete, the actants are integral structural elements.

An interesting application of this model is ‘perspective taking’: the teller can choose to tell the story from the perspective of the different actants and even jump from one perspective to the other, which we consider helpful when working with conflicting parties.

Allegory and **metaphor** can be of help when it comes to understanding complex or delicate topics, and to understand each other: they speak the language of story. *Allegory* uses an entire story to express an idea to teach (e.g. ‘Animal Farm’).

A *metaphor* uses a word or a phrase to represent an idea. The cognitive metaphor is an intrinsic skill. With it we describe an abstract, complex domain (the target domain) in terms of a familiar domain (*source domain*). Examples (target < source) are for instance: Love < journey, migrants < cockroaches, company < tree, etc.

Metaphors can be powerful story changers, they can create a filter through which individuals can see their reality. A frightening example can be comparing migrants with cockroaches – de-humanisation allows ‘extermination’.

Chapter 3 – Narrative, story, and ‘other’ narratives and stories

In daily life there is sometimes confusion about what ‘narrative’ is and what ‘story’. In this chapter we consider interpretations of these concepts, and how they all work to create meaning.

The **structuralist view** distinguishes *narrative*, *story* and *discourse*, wherein the narrative has two parts: story and discourse. In a narrative the story is the ‘what’ (e.g. events, characters, actions), and the discourse is the ‘how’ (the expression/performance of the story).

The **formalist view** uses two terms within a narrative: the *fable* (the basic story ingredients, the sum of events to be related to the narrative, and the *plot* (the story as actually told, linking events). Fable

is ‘what has in fact happened’; *plot* is how the reader/listener becomes *aware* of what happened. Events and actors (story components) are single and discrete, but in the narrative they tend to be related to each other.

Narrative therapy proposes that stories are principally composed of two landscapes – a *landscape of action* and a *landscape of consciousness*.

The *landscape of action* is the “material” of the story (what can be described as (possibly) “known”, i.e. facts, behaviours, contexts)) and is composed of the sequence of events (actions, settings, characters) that make up the *plot* and the underlying theme (*fable*).

The *landscape of consciousness* features the consciousness of the protagonists and is composed of their reflections on the events of the landscape of action – their giving meaning to these events and their conclusions and reflections (and i.e. desires, hopes, values) about the character and identity of others in these events, be it in a fictional or a personal (social) context.

In addition, there is also the issue of **coherence**. Narrative characters must remain the same from one event to the next. If they do not, some explanation (covert or overt) must occur. If in a personal story a teller switches from his personal story and goes on with the story of, for example, his uncle, this ‘identity switch’ can be confusing. So, *some* principle of coherence must operate.

Another point of view towards narrative and story comes from **social constructivism**, the theory that our experience of the world is (partly) constructed by social processes that depend on the society we live in. How we experience and name reality therefore depends on the norms and values that apply in a given society. These so called **dominant discourses** or **dominant narratives** define the boundaries between what is ‘normal’ and desired and what is ‘not-normal’ (e.g. white/black, Muslim/infidel, hetero/gay, etc.). Certain distinctions to which a society gives importance would not be natural distinctions, but *socially negotiated constructions* which, additionally, favour certain inequalities of power.

Here, *narratives* create ‘symbolic universes’, a set of beliefs that aims at making an institutionalised structure (‘men don’t cry’) or a different type of discourse (a dominant narrative – ‘all Muslims are terrorists’) plausible and acceptable.

On an *individual* level we also structure (or connect) stories (or mere events) into a **narrative** that ‘makes sense’ and gives meaning to us. This can be one of our personal ‘life narratives’, for instance ‘I am clumsy (that’s why I always get fired)’, supported by events or **stories** of clumsiness. These narratives can become so dominant that individuals can fail to see (better) alternatives.

As mentioned previously, there is the combat between ‘light’ and ‘dark’. Stories (and narratives) also have a **dark side**, and thus also *destructive* impacts like hate, envy, discrimination, stigmatization, domination, manipulation etc. Therefore they can be or are used for the purpose of creating distances between opinions. Current beliefs suggest that these are the more powerful, ‘attractive’ stories (some media and their followers seem to savour them), and they can be disruptive and destabilizing, creating crippling asymmetries.

Dominant narratives (and social discourses) can shape us, and we tend to believe that the shape is permanent; and then individuals seem to think it’s impossible to change. If these narratives become too dominant, they marginalise groups within societies and take away their agency completely.

Chapter 4 – Conflict, polarisation, reconciliation and transformation

This extensive chapter focuses on the core points of concern of the *Common Ground, Common Future* project. It illustrates the concepts and models of **conflict** and **polarisation**, the phases they go through, the actors and their roles in those, the pitfalls and chances in creating de-escalation,

reconciliation, change and transformation. In this chapter we will also try to clarify the dynamics of both phenomena.

Conflicts often have many and complex histories. Sometimes it is no longer clear what the cause was, and why the cause no longer matters. Conflict mostly arises **unintentionally**.

In psychology conflict is also the area of (internal and external) crises: in personal development, the periods of changes, the periods of 'not knowing for sure', lack of direction, moments of feeling powerless. Then, we are offered rites of passage that help us go through the changes.

There are numerous **conflict areas**: at home, in schools, at work, in politics, football stadiums, on a local, regional, national and even global scale. Which explains that conflict is a continuum: it can stretch from inner conflicts to outright war.

In conflicts, we have to be aware of at least three **cultural dimensions**: *formal culture* ('What you are supposed to do', with a danger of rigidity and suppression), *informal culture* (the ways in which formal structures are interpreted and negotiated), and *tacit culture* (an unspoken set of non-negotiated rules, i.e. 'this is the way we actually do things here').

In the course of time, humans have developed different **responding styles** to conflict situations. The presented descriptions already suggest the responding styles, each of them carrying potential benefits but also costs: *avoiders*, *accommodators*, *compromisers*, *controllers*, and *empathic problem solvers*.

In an apparent contrast to experiences of *asymmetry*, conflicts can also arise through *similarity*. In this view, we are entering a conflict because we all want the same thing, and in this we resemble the other. It can be income, territory, social status, recognition, love, etc..

The interesting conclusion is then that 'the other' in our desire is not only our *model*, but also the *obstacle*. Therefore, it is not the difference in identity that is the split. Both want the same opportunities to study, the same social appreciation, the same land to live on, et cetera.

To make a bridge to polarisation we introduce two models of conflict. The first is Glasl's (1980) **model of conflict escalation**. This is a 3-level, 9-stages model, describing how two conflict parties behave and act, and it already incorporates aspects of polarisation in different stages.

Level 1 (Win-Win) is staged in *Tension* (occasional clashes), *Debate and emerging polarization* (Dispute, emergence of black and white thinking), *Actions instead of words* (Conversation breaks down, compassion for the 'other' fades).

Level 2 (Win-Lose) moves along *alliances / image damaging* (seeking sympathizers; about winning the conflict), *loss of face* (destroy the opponent's identity, insinuations; loss of trust is complete), and *threat strategies* (Threats can become demands, sanctions, retaliation).

Level 3 (Lose-Lose): *limited destruction* (the opponent has to be harmed, is no longer seen as human), *fragmentation* (the opponent's support system is to be destroyed), *together into the abyss* (one even calculates own destruction to defeat the opponent).

Solutions for *reconciliation, transformation and change* are not explicitly offered. Yet, there are suggestions for de-escalation through intervention and facilitation strategies in the different stages, such as moderation, (socio-therapeutic) process support, advocacy and (inter)mediation, and external intervention such as arbitration and court action and even power intervention.

A second model – **the conflict/polarization iceberg** – demonstrates the 'emotional' landscape. The actors in conflicts and polarisation often embark on a journey through the unknown. Some are facing a major conflict for the first time.

Conflicts have an episodic (and sometimes repetitive) character, actors in them may also have their personal conflicts *and* objectives, which are based on personal experiences (and stories) themselves.

These can either contribute and/or affect the maintenance or (re-)ignition of the ‘bigger’ conflict, and polarisation.

Above the surface is the projection of the progress conflict by the *direct actors* (those in conflict with each other and those known to them), where we can see the progression of harm done.

Moving from the prevention and formation phases (where tensions build up, but may be solvable), the **intensification**, **escalation** and **maintenance** phase, and (in steps) undone: the **reduction**, **restoration**, **transformation** and **reconciliation** phases.

From the facilitators/mediators point of view the first two phases are paralleled by **prevention** and **intervention** activities and the following ones by **resolution** and **transformation** oriented activities.

Polarisation *interacts* with conflict. *Below the surface* the iceberg continues with similar phases as above, but then with a slight time lapse which can be explained through the manipulative actions of polarising parties. This is the place where the *indirect actors* are present: those who the direct actors do not know personally, but who are drawn into the conflict story, who choose to follow one of the conflicting parties or are nudged or pulled into the conflict.

Unlike conflict, polarisation is **intentional** in wanting to enhance (or even create) friction, and as such much more *planned* by the human *rational* brain. When (economic and personal) gain is at stake, polarisation and all the narratives and stories connected to it kick in to widen and sustain a conflict.

Those who deliberately create polarisation are coined as **the pushers** (on both sides) - they use the knowledge of emotions and sentiments, they employ ‘empathy’ to *manipulate* parties into an illusion of autonomy, visibility, self-determination, victimization, superiority thinking, and towards exclusion, discrimination, blind hate, violence, and worse. Pushers seek extremes.

Joiners choose a camp, thus gaining visibility, and will generally take a more moderate stance than the pusher. The primary choice is not so much one or the other camp, the choice is *joining*, because one gradually became more sensitive to the story of a pusher and becomes a follower. Joiners are the pool of direct and indirect actors.

The **silent** are the group in the middle that does not (or cannot) choose for either side. They resist polarisation, they are neutral (by choice or profession, e.g. legal people, scientists, clergy, police), but maybe also indifferent. The group of the silent is thought to be the target group of the pusher, especially those who do not feel heard or feel underprivileged.

Bridge builders are those who intend to work on harmony, dialogue and understanding. They want to organise dialogue to analyse differences and similarities, and find counter narratives. But we are warned that giving a stage to opposites, bridge building may also fuel and/or maintain polarisation. An example of ‘bridge-builders’ going astray are the media, offering pushers (from both sides) a platform and thus ‘justification’ of their (polarising) opinions.

The **scapegoat** (which may be the mediator) will be designated during maximum polarisation, and he or she will be found in the middle. When the silent are thinning out and even joiners become pushers, the middle position can become a danger for life.

Conflicts and polarisation need to be handled much more carefully than many governments, conflict managers and many groups of aid workers think. Mediation in the resolution phase with both conflicting parties present can be counterproductive and either lead to mistrust and new accusations and thus resilience to change. Experienced practitioners advise *inter-mediation* first to have both parties reflecting on the conflict and clarifying their needs, which can be conveyed by the facilitator as an introduction to constructive dialogue.

The *transformation* and *reconciliation* phases ask for patience and perseverance in building up mutual trust and confidence. Once the direct actors have an agreement, the indirect actors have to be informed and engaged as well to prevent feelings of abandonment or disappointment.

Mobilising the 'silent' middle in *polarised* contexts can be a way out (making them agents of anti-polarisation). This group has to be invited as influencers of their *direct* environment that may contain 'joiners'. The middle is the most diverse group, and it is precisely diversity that can make depolarisation possible.

Finally, it is stressed that reconciliation is not a fixed endpoint, and peace may not be enduring. As one of the practitioners points out: peace is a long line of conflicts that we have dealt with successfully.

This chapter and the preceding ones have hopefully contributed to awareness as to the onset of conflict and polarisation, and the important role storytelling, stories and narratives play in that. The following chapters are meant to create awareness of the (biological and psychological) *drivers* and how to understand and employ them in facilitating and creating common ground.

Chapter 5 – Emotions and Feelings (problem in Norwegian)

Understanding what happens to people in conflict needs an understanding of emotions. Emotions and feelings also have a (hi)story. They are linked to survival behaviour, experiences, and memories. They are linked to the past, but also to the immediate presence, and to thinking and planning for the future. Everything that we assign meaning to has an emotional charge. In describing the behaviour of humans, emotional words and language are almost inevitable.

Emotions and feelings are *not* the same. We tend to mix up these words.

Emotions are *action orientated*: they have evolved because of their ability to evoke adaptive reactions when there is danger, competition, opportunity to mate, and more. Emotions also occur in animals, we are strongly related to each other: fear, anger, depression, attachment, sexual desire and curiosity we have in common.

All emotions are mixed with *knowledge*, otherwise they would not exist. They are never simple and they are never separate from an evaluation of the circumstances or context. However, when we *observe* an emotion we must realise that it is much more complex than it seems when we call it an 'emotion'.

Feelings arise when emotions penetrate our consciousness, and we become aware of them. We know that we are angry, sad or in love because we **feel** it. A feeling is an inner, *subjective* (private) state that is only known to the one who experiences it. You know what *your* feelings are but you don't know what another person feels, except for what he or she is *telling* you about it. We *show* emotion (and we sometimes fake emotion), but we communicate our feelings through *language*.

When 'emotions run high' in discussing the rights and wrongs of each other's stories it might be difficult to interpret emotions when we do not really know about the feelings attached to them. Indeed, stories elicit engagement, evoke feelings and hopefully empathy. They are probably the best tool we have for understanding what it must feel like to be someone else. Indeed, language helps us to discuss feelings, but it does not play a role in their origin, experience and expression.

Language sticks a label on an inner state, but it does not necessarily distinguish inner states. 'Sad' can have a different meaning for one (or within a different culture) than for the other. In addition, what people tell about their emotions and/or feelings can often be incomplete, sometimes downright

wrong, and often adapted to public (social) opinion or dominant norms. The consequences can be far reaching: the audience can retaliate, envy, punish, disapprove, show pity, or show unpleasant surprise. On the other hand, we are (or have become) aware of such consequences, and that awareness determines how we regulate, intensify or employ *telling* about our feelings

Some emotions are focused on the **future**, such as hope and anxiety, while others are related to the **past**, such as revenge, forgiveness and gratitude. When it comes to conflict, conflict resolution and reconciliation it may be useful to reflect on these very powerful emotions. To hear the words themselves evokes worlds, memories of experiences, persons, feelings, desires, and stories connected to all of them.

Shame, vulnerability and **guilt** are emotions that result from following norms or breaking norms. Shame can be a huge obstacle to a decent exchange of experiences and stories, and also to deconstruction of a problematic, sometimes shared past and present. When experiencing shame, a person contemplates himself or his acts; in doing so he considers himself watched by others and attributes to them condemnation of his deeds. Moreover, when we say that we feel ashamed, we also think (or think we know) that others are disappointed in us.

One can also be ashamed for their kin, their friends, teammates or colleagues, their income, origins and social status, or of a characteristic. However, if we *do* share stories about shame, the fact that someone responds with empathy and understanding can drive shame away.

Vulnerability is often associated with fear, shame, grief, sadness and disappointment. We can be, act, or be perceived as 'vulnerable'. Some researchers tell us that vulnerability is not a 'weakness'. It can be an act of courage. Showing yourself first, sharing a *personal story* of a vulnerable moment, can earn you trust and make you a reliable listener to the other's (vulnerable) story. Accepting (showing respect for) the vulnerability of others also means understanding that they need support. However, when facilitating personal storytelling (in groups), practitioners should also be aware of the 'dark side' of vulnerability: *oversharing*.

Guilt is an emotion close to shame. While shame has to do with the judgement of others, guilt has to do with the judgement of oneself. The social hierarchy provides the original template for guilt. We actually punish ourselves (*internalising* fear of punishment) by feeling bad (guilty or remorseful) about behaviour we have shown or behaviour we should have shown but did not perform. This may also be found among survivors of natural disasters, epidemics, combat, terrorism, or among friends or family of those who committed suicide, which has been coined as *survivor's guilt*. Guilt and shame are nourished by a deep longing for belonging and inclusion – necessary for survival. On the other hand, feeling guilt, but also *showing* guilt ('pleading guilty') shows moral awareness.

With some emotions, the impact is not attached to the result of an event or action but to an object or (other) person. **Anger** is usually generated by frustrated goals or by challenges of your 'status' - shame (for different reasons) can also be a part of that - and it manifests itself in emotional display. In many situations that is enough, but things can get out of hand if the goal is not achieved. Anger can turn into feelings of **hate**. Hate is the kind of emotion that has a component of (personal) evaluation. It is directed against a person and against their existence. However, anger can also be seen as *a way to do something about the conditions of social relations*, it happens here the most: i.e. families stay together because *reconciliation* is also present in these relationships and able to counter anger.

Disgust and **aversion** belong to the oldest emotions. Disgust is clearly visible as a facial expression, In society at large, disgust and aversion are also related to our *moral awareness*: we are disgusted by certain forms of behaviour, but also by corruption, fraud, betrayal, hypocrisy, 'others', as mentioned above. Conforming to disgust or aversion of others – as we experience in **xenophobia** - is no

exception, but widespread. After all, following the example of others (which may or may not be 'healthy') has a greater chance of survival...

Xenophilia - attraction to strangers – is connected to our empathic areas of the brain. This promotes the idea that *acceptance of other groups* has led to cooperation in humans, even on a larger scale. Maybe the truth is in the middle. We should not look at ourselves from the most gruelling (hate, disgust, aversion) perspective, as so many leaders want us to believe. Civilization has something to offer, among other things an ancient capacity for peaceful co-existence.

Chapter 6 – Asymmetries

With some knowledge about the purpose and influence of emotions and feelings, this chapter zooms in on specific (emotion- and feeling related) phenomena that create unrest and conflict.

We accept differences, but only to a certain extent. When a boundary is crossed, we choose sides.

We have a deep-rooted sense of justice born out of a long history of *egalitarianism*, i.e. certain forms of equality: social, opportunity, or political.

'Equity' and 'equality' seem to have the same meaning. Both seem to point toward treating everyone the same – with dignity, respect, appreciation. And yet, there is a difference.

Equality is treating everyone the same. It aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help.

Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equity is about 'equality of opportunity' but is less concerned whether we are all *equal*.

Most of our (epic) stories feature the struggle between justice and **injustice**. However, justice "cannot be limited to single assertions of *what is* right or wrong – because justice is a reflection of what *feels* right or wrong. Inequality evokes feelings of injustice. We *are* keen on monitoring the balance between give and take. We *can't* digest stories of injustice. Discrediting one group's interpretation of injustice as minor *can* undermine shared interpretations.

Given the contemporary obsession with '**truth**' it seems worth investigating what we mean when we talk or write about truth. It seems to play an ever important role in societal debates, social discourses, politics and (social) media.

It's about questions like "What **is** true? What do you **want** to be true? What do **you** believe?" The fact that you could also put the emphasis differently in any of these questions already indicates how complex the domain of 'truth' is. Anyone can make their own truth, if truth is understood as a matter of perspective. 'Truth' can be very conveniently turned into a polarising statement. If 'my truth' is the only perspective, it can become fixed and exclusive – an 'obsession'.

A belief that prioritises perception to *facts* makes truth and identity coincide. The objective, factual reality is then seen as a threat to the subjective and the imagined/constructed reality.

For "post-modern politicians" facts are a burden, and even threatening, and this is why these politicians show contempt of truth (facts) and present their own 'truths', often challenging these through social media.

This opens the way to turn to the tellers of stories and narratives, and *their* truths. And what's more, to the (supporting) role of facilitators/story practitioners and listeners.

When it comes to working with *personal* stories – in contrast to facts, opinions or direct questions – we would have to realize the position of stories and storytelling in social life as a mechanism for the *ritualized negotiation* of truths.

The tension between fact and fiction is an essential aspect of a personal story. Generally, as long as the storyteller and protagonist in the story are the same, the story will be perceived as "true". The truth of a story lies not only in the facts, but also in the interpretation or reflection you attach to the story.

‘Naked truth’ would apply to personal stories as well. When you hold your story against the light, or when others shine their light on it, it might be confronting and something the teller (and even the listeners) would rather avoid.

Some see this as the **paradox of story work**, because in the end the result of the exploration of truth and fiction, opportunity and danger produces a paradox: the telescope is not one view but two, and it must be seen from both ends to be fully understood.

When we talk of story sharing, trust and empathy, truth, about opposites and asymmetries, we also have to talk about the role of the **lie**.

Lying is closely related to the evolution of language, which provided honest and meaningful communication – but it did even more for *deception*. Deceptive communicators did not anymore have to find ways to provide (mime) false experiences for others to *perceive*, their audience could no longer *experientially* verify what they received.

Our capacity of sharing had also brought new opportunities for free-riding, manipulation, coercion, and therefore also lying. And it just might be true that those who tell wonderful stories can also tell wonderful lies.

Chapter 7 – Memories

Memories play an important role in our life- and community stories. They are often related to feelings and emotions. Also, when it comes to ‘truth’, one could refer to the saying that sometimes “memory plays tricks on us”. In this chapter we assess this phenomenon as well when talking about conflicts, especially long-lasting conflicts. Practitioners who want to work with people’s stories of the past, have to be aware of what memories can cause, and of their influence on thinking about the past, the present and the future. Practitioners should also be aware of the mutual influence of autobiographical and collective memory. It can be that learning from memories (by questioning the stories and narratives that come from them) can deliver elements for transformation and future change.

Remembering something is not a linear activity from the past into the future in a cognitive and chronological sequence of events.

Once upon a time Personal memories and everyday events were dysfunctional elements that destroyed the grand, pure picture of history as it should appear. Today, the memories of individuals are important to nuance the reality.

Much of current cognitive neuroscientific research suggests that we are able to flexibly *combine* elements of episodic memory in order to plan for the future, particularly in social contexts.

Autobiographic memory and imagination and constructive episodic memory can act as the basis for *future* episodic simulation.

Involuntary memory a component of memory that occurs when cues in everyday life evoke recollections of the past without conscious effort; the memory comes unsummoned, it is primarily an activity of the senses. A *voluntary memory* is distinguished by a deliberate effort to recall, putting conscious effort into remembering events, people and places. Intentional questioning may trigger both types of memory.

‘*Phantastic*’ memory is a mechanism still present in daily life: as people tell stories (to themselves and others), they explore the areas of their worlds that hold the most opportunity and danger: the

edges of experience. That might explain why people present themselves as ‘heroes’, ‘survivors’ or ‘victims’ in their episodic stories as well as their (dominant) life narratives. We almost never have an ‘ordinary’ life. In the end we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives.

And then there is the phenomenon of *false memories*, which seem to be quite common. We all *misremember* things once in a while, but the fascinating thing is that these ‘memories’ can be rich in detail.

Remembering resembles telling stories – sometimes we forget details and invent new details. And they might not be congruent with reality: “memories are our reality”.

In the *personal* story, the narrator carries with him the raw material of the story. Here we find *both*: the collective and the autobiographic memory, meaning that collective, cultural and historical memory accompany and influence the personal /autobiographic. Thus, an individual's understanding of the past can be strongly linked to this group consciousness. Commemoration offers *collective memory* tie to society and its conceptions where *physical* monuments and rituals fix and affirm *collectivity*.

It seems to be relatively easy to implant *false* and even *fake* memories in people by prompting them with *fake evidence*. False information can influence people's beliefs and memories. It can even induce individuals to accuse another person of doing something they never did. Fabricated evidence may even produce false eyewitness testimony.

And then there are *unprocessed memories*. With respect to narrative and trauma one may state that traumatic experiences describe negative effects and the simple invitation to tell or repeat the traumatic stories has the undesired effect of re-traumatisation. Simply “talking about” or storying traumatic experiences does not ensure healing, not for the individual and not for communities.

However, there is a belief in resilience and in the freedom to choose how one will respond to the situation. One can support each other, and narrative approaches can be of assistance and facilitate the de-construction of (traumatic) memories.

In order to safeguard the co-construction of alternative meanings about someone's (or some community's) life, which was endangered and traumatized, a narrative facilitator can create an initial platform for alternative, desirable descriptions of intentional identity. Building such platforms of preferred personal description and understanding creates ground for further exploration of traumatic experiences, their effects, and the resulting ideas, which can fuel agency.

Chapter 8 – Identity and (life) narratives

Identity cannot be seen separate from stories. The concept of identity, its (erratic) fluidity, its influence on the individual and the group, contributes to belonging, comparison, inclusion, and exclusion.

Narrative identities can differ under circumstances, but some personal identity narratives can be rigid and dominate one's life. Group narratives can become rigid and dominant as well and lead to (judgemental and discriminating) societal discourses, as already mentioned earlier. All identity narratives have a (hi)story and can be the cause of conflicts.

Identities can be considered as *situated performances* : people tell and enact as many different kinds of stories in social life as there are social situations within which to tell and enact them. Thus, identity is akin to a polyphonic novel that is authored by many different voices within a person, all of whom engage in dialogue with each other and with flesh-and-blood characters in the external world.

Considering the identity as a narrative gives us to focus on six important principles:

1. **The Self is storied:** The Self is both the storyteller and the stories that are told
2. **Stories integrate lives:** Disparate ideas, characters, happenings, and other elements of life are brought together in an understandable frame.
3. **Stories are told in social relationships:** People narrate personal events in different ways for different listeners
4. **Stories change over time**
Autobiographical memory is unstable. Over time, experiences make their way into narrative identity.
5. **Stories are cultural texts**
Life stories mirror the culture wherein the story is created and told, according to the norms, rules and traditions.
6. **Some stories are better than others**
Human characters are intentional, moral agents whose actions can always be interpreted as either “good” or “bad” in a given society.

Inherent in the power of stories, lies a danger—the danger of only knowing *one* story about a group. This **single story** creates stereotypes, and stereotypes are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Thus, people’s identities can be reduced to the problem(s) and/or one event they are struggling with. They are ‘labelled’ as fugitive, unemployed, lazy, greedy. The moment one reduces themselves to one identity and starts behaving accordingly, one quickly loses contact with others.

Some of the (myriad) events in one’s life are given emphasis and put into a coherent narrative of e.g. ‘being slow’. The events/stories might be from work situations, relations with family or friends, and memories of school. This can become a dominant narrative, supported by selective memory and perception. Events disconfirming are left unnoticed or untold as insignificant. It can also be supported by similar stories by family, friends and colleagues.

What it shows foremost is that potential other and maybe more empowering narratives (and identities) are ruled out, and that the dominant narrative can be limiting and blocking alternatives, now and in the future, for the individual, groups and whole societies.

The **narrative approach** teaches us that even when we make narratives out of simple *events*, they will be seen as chosen with a view to their place in an implicit narrative.

The story of one’s own life can be somehow clouded, because it is reflexive: the narrator and the protagonist are the same, which creates dilemmas.

The narrative approach (e.g. narrative therapy) aims to make dominant narratives visible and to unpack-them, to see them as just ideas... not truths.

Externalization of the problem, visualizing it and exploring its relative relationships with a person, describing its voice and strategies, helps to make the problem ‘the problem’. At a certain point it becomes manageable for the individual, be it through counter strategies or even bid it farewell, and construct alternative, preferred and achievable (future) narratives. These can empower people to take action and get to grips with life’s challenges, becoming *agents of change*. By inviting people to reflect on the systems that shape their lives this may give people a critical awareness as to the forces that affect their own story.

When it comes to **narrative identities connected to groups**, we have to realise that most of us grow up with stories of certain family members, their successes, their failures and even ‘family secrets’. The stories and images from our family and relatives, the social class we belong to, the culture we are part of, all contribute to the Big Story, the narrative whole that is shared by a broader group, resulting in a more or less shared identity.

These narratives allow individuals to develop different identities, depending on neighbourhood and social class or - in current times – social media in which we are presenting ourselves, as individuals and as communities. Here we enter the borderland between *identity* and *image*, of how we want to be perceived and how we are perceived, and how we perceive others.

If we want to **facilitate awareness and change** we have to understand that the more closed a society is, the more dominant narratives dictate norms and submission to them, often disguised as (national) 'values' and 'identity'. These also include the 'superior we' vs. the 'inferior them' narratives. The rise of populism suggests a desire for more closed societies.

When it comes to conflicts and polarisation, the basic assumption is that conflicts arise because we start fighting about the truth – the true story about who we are or what happened. The conflict stories that the parties share are not seen as referring to facts. Instead we look at what the parties **do** with the stories, what they are performing, how they position themselves in a favourable position and thus disqualify (either themselves or) the other, and which (fictional) ideas and discourses keep conflicts alive.

Dominant (identity) narratives can create vicious circles, e.g. when a chance historical situation (discovery of a continent) is translated into a rigid social system (for example, slavery), which can influence the social structure for hundreds of years.

For change facilitators it is important to spend time on exploring and externalising these different ideas to allow the parties to become aware and understand the effect of living according to these ideas and their impact on themselves and on others. It creates an opportunity to oppose these ideas or at least understand that they are 'just' that - ideas.

The possible positive effects of an intervention through working with stories for (stigmatised, discriminated) individuals or groups are:

Awareness of the dominant narrative, realistic self-perception, self-confidence (take leave from past / dominant narrative), (finding) alternative (future) stories, positive attitude, action readiness and planning, actual action, (perceived and actual) inclusion.

The possible positive effects of an intervention through working with stories for the dominant (discriminating, disapproving) group:

(Critical) awareness of dominant discourse, realistic perception of other, respect for other, acceptance of other, action readiness, (active) support, and inclusion.

Chapter 9 – Empathy and Sympathy

We are (unconsciously) mirroring someone else's behaviour or emotion (mirror neurons), our brains are built to feel another's pain. There must be an adaptive and social value of that for us. If we know how to empathize, can we manipulate or hurt others with it as well? Empathy seems to differ from sympathy, but both have a meaning in relationships.

As some authors (Brown, 2012) point out, **empathy** has the following characteristics: seeing the world through the eyes of the other, nonjudgement (not judging someone else's experience), understanding someone else's feelings (staying in touch with our own feelings to understand someone else's behaviour), expressing understanding of someone else's feelings.

Others (De Waal, 2009) define three **layers of empathy**, which are: State Matching: A correspondence of mood (mirroring / state matching) will evoke emotional contagiousness (most species). Around this core, evolution has been building up ever more refined capacities, like feeling with the other. Sympathetic Concern: care for others is expressed in consolation (primates and humans). Perception Taking: taking perspective of the other (we are able to imagine) will lead to

targeted help (mostly present in humans). When individuals are deprived of a caring environment when they grow up, emotional regulation – necessary for empathy – is severely damaged.

There is also a **distinction between empathy and sympathy**. It may even be that empathy is a *neutral* capacity: it can be used for better or for worse, depending on someone's intentions. There are individuals (e.g. psychopaths), who use their empathic ability to torment others. Also, there is the assumption that empathy seeks information about others and helps to understand their situation, whereas sympathy is about actual concern for others. Sympathy is *action-oriented*, it often has its roots in empathy, for example: going 'into the skin' of a drowning person will not prevent the other drowning, jumping into the water and rescuing the other will. The sympathetic action is thus *based* on empathy, insight and/or calculation.

In society and politics there seems to be a trend to abuse 'empathic sensing' as a social power that structures moral discourses, meaning that *projections of moral concern* or care are imposed on 'weaker' persons by empowered persons. Given the current communication of populists, this might be a trend we should not underestimate.

However, if we stay away from the pitfalls, empathy and sympathy have the potential to make us super-co-operators. We need each other to survive.

When we apply this to **story listening**, we have to be aware that listening is not our strong suit, and in conflict talks, people are often so much taken by their emotions and feelings that genuine listening falls short. (Empathic) listening requires focus and attention. Listening is intentional (indeed, like telling) and to a single 'message' (e.g. a story, music). Inattentive, distracted listeners can undermine the sharing of (personal) stories.

Telling on the other hand can be limited to sending. Once we **tell** a story we are also obliged to receive and 'listen' (with our eyes) what is going on in our audience, be it one person or a group. We have to be aware of the interaction of the teller and the listener.

When it comes to the interaction of teller and listener, a model (**the four ears**) is offered, with four facets for the teller's message and the listeners interpretation: *factual information*, *self-revelation*, *relationship*, and *appeal*. The listener has four ears with which he is able to receive and interpret the message. Depending on which of the four ears he gives priority, the interaction can differ. Switching off (unconsciously) one or more of the ears can change the course of the conversation.

Another model tunes in more practically into empathic listening with making us aware of the **channels** that either impair or disempower or support recognition and appreciation of the teller. It is a rising scale: *Tuned out*, *Judgmental* (listening to self), *Listening to similarities*, *Critical* (listening for evidence), *Empathic* (from the teller's perspective), and *Generative* (insight, listening from possibilities).

Storytelling occasions are full of potential for change and transformation when others - the listeners - can be induced to help.

'**Double listening**' is another practical approach. It means listening at the same time for expressions of the conflict story and for elements of other stories, particularly for those elements that might become part of a possible counter-story). It involves listening for both, the dominant story, and other possible stories aside, behind or underneath, and it also involves listening to bifurcations where different stories part company.

Double listening requires meticulous training, but it can turn out a valuable approach, especially because it is a chance to give back a sense of agency to the parties in a conflict, rather than a sense of being a victim to the situation and/or a lack of choice.

Chapter 10 – Cultural and contextual sensitivity

Individuals and groups can come from the same culture as ours, but a practitioner/facilitator might also encounter individuals from other cultures, sometimes even groups consisting of diverse cultural backgrounds. Thinking of diversity, one will have to consider gender, literacy, education, religion, profession, age and any possible mixture of all that. In addition, ‘power’ and ‘power relationships’ also influence behaviour, individually and in and between groups.

Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong. Cultural sensitivity implies that groups understand and respect each other’s characteristics. This can be a challenge for members of dominant cultures.

The domain of **contextual sensitivity** implies that people are sensitive to stereotypes and try to unconditionally accept others at face value. We can add qualities like perspective taking, to see the world the way in which others view and perceive things. Contextually sensitive people are able to pick up on emotionally charged language, as well as emotional meanings and implications. They refrain from using manipulative language.

Being aware of this, necessary qualities of the facilitators would be: respect (stepping back), humility (listening thoroughly to others, being aware of our limits), and empathy (and by that empowering the other).

Power relationships have always existed. Sometimes power is enforced on others resulting in harm, but sometimes this relationship comes from a different, accepted hierarchical agreement (e.g. parent-child, teacher-student, employer-employee, government-citizens), relationships which *imply* force, but not actually impose it.

When working with individuals, groups and/ or communities, you need to be aware that due to the characteristics of the participants there is a chance a power relationship is there, in which facilitators have a certain level of power. A healthy balance of power in a relationship can be achieved through: *Attention* (when both parties feel that their (emotional) needs are met), and *Integrity* (when each partner maintains a positive value of the self and is able to be his own person within and outside the relationship).

Chapter 11 – Narrative approaches and applied storytelling for reconciliation, transformation and change

As the Compendium shows, stories are inextricably linked with how people perceive and try to understand and adapt to the world, themselves and others. Narrative approaches and applied storytelling are plausible solutions if we want to understand, investigate, deconstruct, and resolve conflicts. In this chapter we present a choice of approaches. Some focus more on personal (conflict and trauma) stories, others more on collective, socially, and culturally determined stories and narratives.

Participatory Narrative Inquiry is an approach in which (groups of) people participate in gathering (and working with) raw stories of *personal* experience in order to make sense of complex situations for better decision making. It works for mixed groups and communities, but also for cohorts within communities (e.g. unemployed 50+, single mothers, victims of the same trauma), and it not only can benefit the group (cohesion, mutual understanding, mutual support) but also the individual and his/her individual decision making and (new) focus.

PNI focuses on the profound consideration of values, beliefs, feelings and perspectives through the recounting and interpretation of *lived experience*. Factual elements, truth, evidence, opinion, argument and proof may be used as material for meaning- and sensemaking, but they are always used *from* a perspective and *to gain* perspective. This focus defines, shapes and limits the approach.

What makes PNI attractive is that it is a practical method. It grew over the course of real projects with real storytellers, real needs, real constraints, and real collaborators. One thing is paramount: 'the individual/community (their knowledge / experiences) is the expert'.

PNI can roughly be seen in three stages: Planning (including assessment of readiness, actors and needs in the community), Collecting (and sharing) stories, Meaning Making (joint and shared analysis, conclusions, opportunities) and returning it (alternative or counter stories) to the community.

Game changers

During the intervention stage, and especially the *maintenance phase* the power of the pushers is too great. Mediating through dialogue could be counterproductive and can lead to scapegoating or firing up polarisation even more.

Inter-mediation is proposed, in which the individual parties can first ask *themselves* what insights, what attitude their culture, religion or philosophy of life stands for. What can they bring in when it comes to conflicts? What do holy scriptures, beliefs, philosophical currents, philosophers contribute? What is an Islamic, Christian, humanistic approach to conflict? Searching within one's own sources, listening to the sources of others, can ignite inspiration, clarify needs, create a new 'us', a new system of values. Exchange of these with 'the other' can lead to better mutual understanding.

Other options to create favourable conditions are these four **game changers**:

1. *Change the target group*: depolarisation (as polarisation) goes via the middle. Make it your investment area, and give the pushers no longer attention. It can be done with recruiting allies: role models or key figures within a community, and other allies (e.g. mothers with influence).

2. *Change the subject – 'the absent but implicit'*

Depolarisation means radically moving away from the identities of the opposites. The subject (or problem) then is not 'aggressive immigrant youth', 'thieving Roma' or 'selfish natives', for example, but 'security'. That knocks the gun 'fear' or 'evil' out of the hand of the pusher. It is important to not only listen to the problem in the foreground, but also to the "absent but implicit": the idea that a perceived problem is never the full story.

3. *Change of position*.

In addition to changing subject and target group, *changing position* is also a strategic choice.

For instance through *listening* to the middle, knowing the middle. People want to be listened to. Speaking from the middle (e.g. "We as citizens...") does not point at opponents and takes the sting out of the conflict. Storytelling initiatives can be of added value to that.

4. *Changing the tone*

This is probably the toughest issue. If you want to deconstruct conflicts or depolarise, don't moralise. Asking the right questions is paramount: not closed questions like "Is it or isn't it?" but, for example, "What do you recognise about yourself/in him/in her/them/in the topic?" The tone of voice must be the tone of *real interest*. Nuance only gets the chance after real, non-judgemental recognition of the position.

The **coexistence model** focuses on bridging differences between conflicting narratives of groups in a positive way, with a focus on togetherness and cooperation, or on finding common ground. A consequence of this is that this approach does not directly address the conflict underlying the tension between the two groups and the dilemmas raised by the conflict. It is a so-called *non-confrontational* approach.

Before this process can be set in motion, the *asymmetric relationship* that is at the root of many conflicts has to be identified to prevent the asymmetry from impeding reconciliation.

Here, too, it is the narratives about each other that play a major role. These stories are often the basis of *power relations*. Asymmetric relationships are sometimes directly demonstrable, but often they are much more subtle, sometimes merely through the use of certain words or images and not even always consciously by those who use them.

Thus, *language* can be an important element. Also, if you are working with two groups that do not speak the same language, it is wise to work in a third, neutral language. In this way, you prevent one of the groups from having an advantage and thus becoming dominant. The composition of the team of facilitators is also an aspect to look closely at. It is better to work with facilitators who do not belong to any of the groups and who cannot be linked in any way to any of those groups. Or one can work with a larger team, with representatives from all groups.

Restorative justice can be applied in more contexts than what it was originally intended for: the judicial system. Restorative justice views crime as more than breaking the law – crime causes harm to people, relationships, and communities. Justice here means ‘justice’ for all in any circumstance. The basic principles of restorative justice are around *harm* and *relationship*, and in this it goes beyond the classical objective of ‘retribution’. In the context of conflict (especially in the phases where harm is or has been done) it makes sense to take a closer look. Effective restorative justice and practices foster awareness of how others have been affected by inappropriate behaviour. It is a process whereby those most directly affected by wrongdoing come together to determine what needs to be done to repair the harm and prevent a recurrence. This can lead to the transformation of people, relationships and communities. Restorative practices have elements that make them explicit rather than implicit: It stresses that the approach is about working **with** people rather than doing things **to** or **for** them. A *fair process*, including engagement (involving individuals in decisions), *explanation* (everyone should understand why decisions are made), and *expectation clarity* (everyone understands the new rules and boundaries). Free expression of emotions: all will have the freedom to express all of their emotions or feelings, including those which are negative. The process can lead to transformation because it can result in fundamental changes in people, relationships and communities. It provides a chance of prevention of recurrence, and in some cases even a chance of reconciliation and reintegration. It requires a cooperative attitude and effort by communities, government *and* the judiciary.

Nonviolent communication (NVC, sometimes called Collaborative Communication) clearly overlaps with topics we have addressed in the previous chapters. It originates from a belief that we all have a capacity for compassion and empathy. The only reason we move to violence or to harmful behaviour (verbal, psychological or physical) towards others when we do not recognize more effective strategies for our needs. NVC is a mainly verbal approach that can help us to lead participants into storytelling, analysing how these stories impede relationships and communication. It helps to understand behaviour, and change it towards a beneficial communication and relationship.

Dialogue For Peaceful Change offers an assessment approach – the **Pillars Analysis** – that can be based on story collection. The Pillars Analysis is a tool that can help to assess the key issues and dynamics that underlie and/or sustain the conflict. Each party can identify them separately or (in a recovery or reduction phase) together. By working on the pillars (and the stories attached to the issues addressed) that support the conflict, there is an opportunity to create a constructive momentum to change the impact of the conflict.

Additionally, there is an elaborately worked out **six stage process to conflict resolution** and reconciliation and the rules and the roles (of the facilitators) is explained. Each stage involves summarizing and concluding the stage and outlining the next stage to individuals and groups. We are reminded that the key element in conflict management and depolarisation is **time**.

Only when all participants agree, it is possible to arrange the next stage.

The stages are, briefly:

Individual storytelling: to share their understanding of the (conflict) situation).

Joint storytelling: each of the parties will allow the other to share their stories (and perceptions) uninterrupted, and with an open ear for mutual positive comments.

Framing the issue:, the moment to establish the key issues. The parties are invited to think *together* of the benefits, and find solutions to the identified issues.

Creative problem solving: now they (each participant) have to share their ideas how they would overcome the issues and dynamics they have acknowledged, and come to an agreement. As with the prior stages, more than one meeting may be required.

Formalising the agreement and follow up: this stage is mainly to minimise the risk of losing momentum.

Melting the iceberg (looking at the iceberg model, we should step back and not forget the indirect and vicarious actors. They could lag behind, for reasons of communication. It implies that the parties involve 'their' indirect actors in the process in time).

Conclusion

Each narrative approach we want to apply – including the choice for e.g. story collecting and meaning-making, dialogue, (inter)mediation - becomes determined by the context: the personal, the group, the social, the community, the nation, etc... It also shows that we have to be aware of the 'where and when' that the various approaches can be implemented most constructively.

The bottom line of conflict solution and depolarisation is that we have to be aware of reconciliation as the endpoint: it can lead to a transformation, but a definite change cannot be reached if the indirect and vicarious groups have not had the opportunity to be informed about the process the parties have gone through. They will have to digest that the parties have found a common ground, have made agreements and have processed a new, common future, based on a consensual coexistence. If not, the danger of either enduring polarisation lurks, and otherwise the hidden danger of the flaring up of old (and still unprocessed) conflicts.

Peace, as one of the authors mentions, is *not* the absence of conflict; it is the way we (learn to) deal with a series of conflicts in a constructive way. It is life-long learning that stretches from generation to generation. Evolution never stops.

The approaches in this compendium and the practical exercises and applied storytelling activities we offer in the CGCF toolkit and the Guidelines are hopefully valuable resources for conflict solution and depolarisation – if used sensibly.

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